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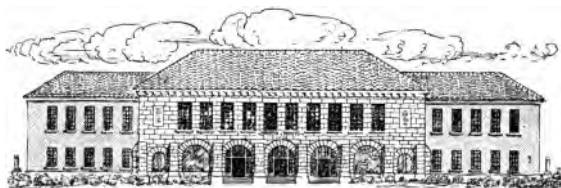
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LESSING'S EDUCATION OF THE HUMAN RACE

BY

JOHN DEARLING HANEY, M.A., LL.B.

Principal P. S. 5 Bronx

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PREFACE

Lessing's tractate, *The Education of the Human Race*, is an account of how the world received and is still receiving revelation that is to prepare man for the attainment of the best that is in him. This involves the notion of a racial education and a conception of the inter-dependence of all social phenomena—the unity of man with nature and the correlation of moral and political theory. Ideas of this import had engaged the minds of thinkers from the time of Plato, but found more or less imperfect expression until the time of Kant and of Comte, the founder of "sociology."

The eighteenth century, spurred by the impetus of the Reformation and the scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century, became engrossed with the revelation of the power and destiny of man. The feeling that man was not an "accident" but the necessary complement of an otherwise incomplete system, gave an added force to the validity of man's ideas. Champions of deistic thought sprang up everywhere: in France, in England, in Germany. But England, owing to the philosophy of Locke, which led to "religious" doubt and abnegation, proved the most prolific source of deism. The "common sense" of Locke led to Toland's *Christianity not Mysterior*, Tindal's *Christianity as old as the Creation*, Voltaire's *Lettres Philosophiques*, and a host of other French and English followers. The arguments of both the English and the French defendants were soon echoing in Germany and found as ardent supporters there.

It must not be supposed that these deists had much in common besides a fundamental theory that whatever is, is right. They bandied certain stock arguments, such as the absence of an exclusive heaven for believers, which are still heard to-day, and dogmatized and reviled very much in the manner of preceding "Christians." William Law, the mystic, derided rationalism; while Tindal proclaimed that the very attempt to destroy reason by reason, was a demonstration that man had nothing but reason to which to trust.

Lessing, though affected by this deistic development, did not share the tendency to condemn the Jews. What he got of value from the controversy, is the very thing for which a perusal of this work is valuable for us, namely, the point of view. He reveals the essence of eighteenth century individualism in the unity which he perceived in a fully articulated difference. This

makes him a protagonist of *evolution* and *development*. What this means for modern thought can be seen from Leslie Stephen's statements in regard to those concepts: "Whether the development be described as a process of divine education or as an evolution determined by natural laws, it would be equally admitted on all hands that man, in the infancy of the race, was fitted for an order of ideas entirely different from that which would be appropriated at a later epoch. But in all the contemporaries there is a curious inability to accept this view." It is equally hard for us to-day to accept any other. It was, too, Lessing's conclusion.

Thus, though Lessing's theology may repel us, his humanity attracts; though his exegesis may seem tedious and wire-drawn, his exultation is infectious. Like Milton's philosopher, we sit with Lessing i' the center and enjoy bright day. We feel the poetry and the rhapsody of the master and revel in the keen analysis and vaticination of a seer. We become rationalistic-romanticists like Nathan, and feel the passion of Novalis and the contemplative placidity of Kant. We see the centuries stretching to dim distance behind and to dim futurity beyond; we feel the hallowed twilight "which a soft evening glow neither quite encloses nor quite reveals." For Lessing saw education in its larger racial aspects, as a genesis, as a social ergon: saw it with a philosophy.

His argument is analogical and has the weakness of analogies. He thinks revelation is education because education reveals God to men, or reveals the unity of nature to man; and revelation does likewise. He thinks revelation is education because education arouses spiritual aspiration; and revelation aroused the rude Hebrews to aspire. He thinks revelation is education because education is not merely writing but an exhibition of the divine; and so is revelation. To be sure, the reader may deny the analogy and puncture the argument, but he can never gainsay or forego the impetus that arises from the conception.

Finally, since, like all considerations of philosophy, this treatise is only a small cross-section of the history of thought, the introduction and notes must be borne with as patiently as may be. Their intrusion occurs only that Lessing's contribution may be able to appear in its completeness.

CONTENTS

PART I

Aspects of Eighteenth Century Thought	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Epochs of Lessing's Life and Ideas	-	-	-	-	-	-	13

PART II

Analysis of Lessing's Tractate	-	-	-	-	-	-	30
The Education of the Human Race	-	-	-	-	-	-	33

PART I

Introduction

Nathan. For Truth!
And wants it hard and bare, as Truth were coin.
Yes, if an ancient coin which went by weight
I grant you! But this coinage of to-day
That's counted down and has no other value
Except the stamp upon it,—that it's not.
Act III. Sc. 6.

An adequate consideration of Lessing's tractate, the *Education of the Human Race*, demands: (1) a resumé of the most important aspects of European thought into which Lessing was born and in which he lived (A), and a review of the chief epochs of his life and the ideas for which he contended (B); (2) the tractate itself. In this way it may be deduced how Lessing came naturally to think as he did; what his ideas actually were; and what those ideas may fairly be said to anticipate or to lead to.

1. A. A resumé of the most important aspects of European thought into which Lessing was born:

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's life extended from 1729 to 1781. Rationalism was then in full career but was slowly being paralleled by naturalism.

The experiments of Bacon and Galileo reinforced by the philosophy of Locke and Descartes, had brought metaphysics in the seventeenth century under the dominion of mathematics and science; and Reason, at whose court Voltaire was later to be such an important functionary, was holding sovereign sway. Out of the philosophy of Descartes had grown that of Spinoza (1632-1677), Leibniz (1646-1716), Wolff (1679-1754) and Rousseau (1712-1778, *Essays* 1750, 1754, *Nouvelle Heloise* 1760, *Social Contract* 1761, *Emile* 1762). Kant (1724-1804) and Herder (1744-1803) were to be the descendants of these.

The line of Pope (1688-1744), "The proper study of mankind is man," is not unaptly taken as indicating the direction of English thought in the eighteenth century, and Minto points

out in his *Literature of the Georgian Era* how representative of English thought was the novel of manners, such as *Sir Charles Grandison* and *Tom Jones*. "Feeling," as a "faculty," hardly became differentiated before the *Nouvelle Heloise* (1760); and "nature" in literature generally meant "man" prior to Thomson's *Seasons* and von Kleist's *Frühling* (1749). Indeed, despite the spiritual beauty and inspiration of the *Frühlingsfeier* and *Messias* of Klopstock (1724-1803), we look in vain through *Nathan the Wise* (1779) for any of that beauty of nature that Shakspeare, so ardently expounded by Lessing, would have revealed in.

But Rationalism makes the individual self-dependent or, rather, independent, and thus the rationalistic movement assumed the phase known as individualism. In essence there is no difference between the two, but the different names are useful in emphasizing somewhat different points of view.

Individualism, or atomism, became monadistic under the hands of Leibniz, but under Rousseau's treatment it assumed the form of Naturalism. The individual, having made a state for his own convenience, could dissolve the bonds when they proved irksome. This was the thesis of the *Social Contract*. Thus Rationalism assumed its new guise.

All three of these viewpoints: rationalism, individualism, naturalism, must be kept in mind in considering the work of Lessing, for he, in one way or another, and in higher or lower degree, emphasizes all. But before passing on to see how he does so (Cf. 1B and Part II *post*) a better idea of the development of his thought can be got by considering some of his predecessors more in detail.

Voltaire: Voltaire's attitude is important as it illustrates so well the French state of mind on the eve of the Revolution, and because Voltaire was profoundly impressed by the characteristic empirical English philosophy, which he studied in England itself, especially from the scolding Bolingbroke. Applauding natural religion as opposed to revealed religion he says to Uranie in one of his Epistles:

Songe que du Très—Haut la sagesse éternelle
A gravé de sa main dans le fond de ton cœur
La Religion naturelle.

It is noteworthy that this condemned "atheist," like Spinoza, another thinker branded by the same opprobrium, stands as uncompromisingly as do Kant, Schelling and Royce, for the essential religious tendency in man. And Lessing, too, though he dealt such blows to the orthodox, never receded a step from his belief in an Absolute and a Divine. Nay, as the *Education of the Human Race* shows, the more nearly he stripped religion of what he would consider its trappings, the more thoroughly religious he became. Kant himself, the author of three critiques, who sought truth by radical skepticism, founds his whole system on duty and an appeal to the supersensible. And even Hume, the arch sceptic, is haunted by a feeling of some mystic power.

Voltaire continues:

Le Dieu que je dois adorer
Je croirais le dishonorer
Par un si criminel hommage:
(i. e. such as God, then received)
Entends, Dieu que j'implore, entends du haut des Cieux,
Une voix plaintive et sincère:
Mon incrédulité ne doit pas te déplaire
Mon cœur est ouvert à tes yeux
On te fait un tyran; en toi je cherche un Père
Je ne suis pas Chrétien, mais c'est pour t'aimer mieux.¹

And lastly, says this freethinker, he is guided through the horror of eternal night that seems to surround the temple of true religion, by his reason:

Mais la raison qui m'y conduit
Fait marcher devant moi son flambeau
qui m' éclaire.

¹ Compare Royce: *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, p. 229: "A clerical friend of the author's impressed him very much in early youth by the words: God likes to have us doubt his existence, if we do so sincerely and earnestly. These words are almost a truism; they surely ought to be a truism. Yet they have been forgotten in many a controversy. Surely if God exists, he knows at least as much about philosophy as any of us do; he has at least as much appreciation for a philosophic problem as we can have. And if his own existence presents a fine philosophic problem, he delights therein at least as much as we do." Also §§ 76 and 78, *Education*, *post*.

This laudation of Reason is suggestive of the reiteration of the word "sense" in Pope's *Essay on Man* and *Essay on Criticism*, and of the reiteration of the word Reason throughout the *Education of the Human Race*.

Rousseau: Closely akin to Voltaire is Rousseau, his rival and bitter opponent. In the *Social Contract*, Liv. iv., Ch. viii, on *La religion de l'homme*, Rousseau, who has just been attacking ceremonial religion, says that in addition to that, there is la religion de l'homme:

Reste, donc, la religion de l'homme ou le christianisme, non pas celui d'aujourd'hui, mais celui de l'Évangile, qui en est tout-à-fait différent. Par cette religion sainte, sublime, véritable, les hommes, enfans du même Dieu, se reconnoissent tous pour frères, et la société qui les unit ne se dissout pas même à la mort.²

Spinoza: With the question whether Lessing was a Spinozist, or not we are not now concerned. Sime in *Lessing: His Life and Writings*, v. 2, p. 303, quotes Guhrauer, Hempel, Schwartz, and Fontanès to show that he was not; Heine to show that he was a Deist on the road to Spinoza; and Danzel, Hettner, and Jacoby to show that he was a Spinozist. What it is necessary to know is: What did Spinoza contribute to the thought of his time and how much may Lessing have been influenced by him.

Spinoza's *Ethics* was published posthumously in 1677, and so was known to Lessing who, however, was not familiar with the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, the Latin original of which was not extant and was found in a Dutch translation only as recently as 1852. Lessing was a profound student of both Leibniz and Spinoza, devoting himself to the latter from 1760 to 1763 when the Jew's name was infamous.

As Royce gets to the spirit of modern philosophy through the gateway of Spinoza, it will be profitable to consider some of the things for which the outcast Jew stands. He was, though

² Cf. Lessing's distinction of "the religion of Christ" and "the Christian religion." Sime's *Lessing: His Life and Writings*; also, the conception of Goethe, a Spinozist, of the distinction between philosophy and theology. *Life and Times of Goethe* by Herman Grimm, tr. by Sarah H. Adams, p. 207.

brought up on Descartes, a vigorous and independent thinker, using a mathematical method only to reduce his errors to a minimum; he endured privation and obloquy for the sake of opinions, and constantly refused overtures of aid from those richer than he; he sought, in philosophy, not a speculative, but a practical, guide;³ he was the associate of Leibniz, some of whose views (i. e. the continuity of nature,⁴ and the attainment of knowledge through clear ideas⁵) he seems to reflect, but differs with him as a monadologist in the conception⁶ that nothing can be destroyed from within, as all change must come from without.

His conception of all nature, actual or potential, as an effluence of Substance or God,⁶ has several important corollaries: Nature is uniform, that is, there can be no violation of her laws without chaos;⁷ the world cannot have been created for any limited end,⁷ e. g. the good of man, because that makes it anthropomorphic and not Absolute and Eternal; volition depends upon ideas and is identical with understanding;⁸ everything endeavors to persist in its own being;⁹ individual well-being is best promoted by social well-being and social effort.¹⁰

The extreme likeness of these views to some of those held by Lessing cannot fail to be perceived as Lessing's attitude becomes clearer by further exposition.

In addition to these, it may be well to note a few of the notions contained in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. His whole plea there is for religious liberty and simply piety: that freedom of thought should not only be granted but cannot be withheld without danger.¹¹ "Revelation has obedience for its sole object, and therefore, in purpose no less than in foundation and method, stands entirely aloof from ordinary knowledge; each has its

³ Cf. *Improvement of the Understanding*.

⁴ Cf. *Ethics*, Part 1.

⁵ *Ethics*, Part 3.

⁶ *Ethics*, Part 1.

⁷ *Ethics*, Part 1.

⁸ *Ethics*, Part 2. Cf. Dewey's voluntaristic psychology in *Interest as Related to Will*.

⁹ *Ethics*, Part 3.

¹⁰ *Ethics*, Part 4. Cf. Dewey's *School and Society*. Most of these doctrines will be found summarized in his Political Treatise, especially under Ch. 2 on Natural Right.

¹¹ Ch. 20. Cf. Lessing's frankness and vigor of speech in the *Wolfenbüttel Fragments*, *Anti-Goeze*, *Nathan* and the *Education of the Human Race*.

separate province, neither can be called the handmaid of the other."¹²

"Everyone should be free to choose for himself the foundations of his creed, and faith should be judged only by its fruits."¹³ "The natural rights of the individual are coextensive with desires and powers, and * * * no one is bound to live as another pleases but is the guardian of his own liberty."¹⁴

Spinoza in Ch. 2, notes the slow growth of the idea of God's omniscience and omnipresence. This idea of *development*, the gradually perfected notion of God and all that a conception of him involves, is of the very essence of the *Education of the Human Race* as will be pointed out later.

The essential individualism is, of course, apparent here—indeed, so violently so that Spinoza's appeal for *social* helpfulness, nay, the necessity of it, is apt to be lost sight of. But it must not be forgotten that the strong humanity of *The Education of the Human Race* and of *Nathan* are vitally dependent on the conception of the interdependence of the individual and society. These two must not be regarded as mutually exclusive or antagonistic. Similarly, Froebel pleads for a development of individuality, but not the destructive individuality of Rousseau. He seeks a contained and directed individuality that finds its most fruitful field in society and social coöperation. The notion of Froebel is no more difficult to grasp than that of Spinoza and of Lessing and, indeed, does not differ in this particular from either.

Leibniz: Lessing was also a profound student of Leibniz and owes much to him no doubt, but rather in method than in matter. In one of his essays he gives Spinoza the credit of discovering the doctrine of prearranged harmony without which Leibniz would never have been able to make a connection between the windowless monad, the soul, and the windowless

¹² *Preface*, Elwes translation, p. 9. Cf. Lessing's comments on the first *Wolfenbüttel Fragments*, *post*.

¹³ *Preface*, *ib.*, p. 10. Cf. *Nathan's* individualism.

¹⁴ *Preface*, *ib.*, p. 10. Cf. for definition of natural right, ch. 2, of *A Political Treatise* and note *Nathan's Must to Haf*, Act I, Sc. 3, or § 2 of the *Education of the Human Race*, *post*.

monad, God.¹⁵ But Spinoza needed no prearranged harmony: his system was a harmonious whole in its very conception.

Leibniz stands for an atomistic or individualistic philosophy; for continuity of creation; for scientific induction and method; for vigor of utterance; and for "enlightenment" or the necessity of ridding dark or vague ideas of their darkness and vagueness. But his conception of the universe is much more mechanical and unsatisfactory than that of Spinoza, who is undoubtedly Lessing's great inspiration and philosophic teacher.

It may be well to reiterate some of the points that have been evolved in the foregoing discussion, points which Lessing will exemplify in his *Education of the Human Race* and *Nathan the Wise*. They are: Rationalism; Individualism with collectivistic or socialistic leaning; Naturalism; and Continuity or Evolution.

I-B. A review of the chief epochs of Lessing's life and the ideas for which he contended.

Lessing came naturally by his bent for theological discussion. His clerical ancestors extend back at least as far as Clemens Lessing (c. 1580); his grandfather, Theophilus, wrote, as a thesis for his Master's degree, "*De Religionum Tolerantia*,"¹⁶ and his father, Johann Gottfried, was a pastor of some distinction, a close student despite poverty, and a writer with a literary style free from pedantry, but with a horror of Catholicism, Pietism, and Scepticism.

Lessing was a precocious student and devoured classics and mathematics—subjects that later made Leibniz a congenial writer for him.

In 1746, he went to Leipsic to pursue theology, but continued his classical studies and took part in philosophic discussions presided over by Kästner, a professor of mathematics. It was here, too, that he began his close association with the theatre, an association that could not fail to help him toward those independent views that made him the black sheep of his family and one of the most distinguished poets and dramatists of Germany. Here,

¹⁵ Darin bin ich noch Ihrer meinung, dass es Spinoza ist, welcher Leibniz auf die vorherbestimmte Harmonie gebracht hat.

¹⁶ Sime, v. I, p. 21.

too, he made a friend of Christlob Mylius, a man who had ventured to applaud a Kamenz rector who had published, much to the indignation of the Rev. Johann Gottfried Lessing, a work called *The Theatre as a School of Eloquence*. Mylius, also, edited, for a year, a paper called *The Freethinker*. Such was the company that the clever and socially disposed Gotthold Ephraim fell into at the outset of his career.

In 1748, he went to Berlin to be a journalist and critic and to reinforce, with terseness and vigor, a style that was to make him one of the most dreaded of opponents and one of the most stimulating of essayists and thinkers.

In 1751 he returned to Wittenberg at the request of his family, who heard aghast of his strange ways of studying theology, and here he had a disagreement with Voltaire that led to an acrimonious correspondence which, years later, prevented his getting preferment from Frederick the Great.

In 1752, the Wittenberg resolve not persisting, he returned to Berlin and edited a periodical called the *Theatrical Library*, and became known definitely as a theatrical critic of constructive tendencies. He entered upon the attack on Gottsched,¹⁷ the Leipsic professor, who upheld French art as a model; wrote a keen satire on Lange, who had translated Horace; showed his skill and penetration in his Epigrams; and composed critical letters on German literature. The *Ein Vade Mecum für den Herrn Sam. Gotth. Lange* revealed his ability as a controversialist of profound attainments and his fame as a polemic became thoroughly established. It was to be no novice that entered the arena against Goeze twenty years later.

It was during these years that he wrote *Das Christentum der Vernunft*,¹⁸ which is of interest in connection with his exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity in *The Education of the Human Race*; and the several *Theologische Rezensionen aus der Berlinischen Privilegierten Zeitung*, among which is (1751) Stück 143, a consideration of Warburton's *Göttliche Sendungen Moses*,¹⁹ which hints at the origin of sections 24 and 25 of *The Education of the Human Race*.

¹⁷ Cf. Kuno Francke's *Social Forces in German Literature, Art, Gottsched*, p. 179.

¹⁸ Lessing's *Sämtliche Werke*, v. 17, p. 23. Cotta Library.

¹⁹ *Ib.* p. 38.

In Berlin he learned to know and to admire such Jews as Mendelssohn, the original of Nathan, and Dr. Gumperz, and here he worked on a comedy, *Die Juden*, which had been written in 1749. Stück 93, of 1753, in the *Theologische Rezensionen* was a notice of *Schreiben eines Juden an einen Philosophen*,²⁰ in which, after reflecting on the shameful restrictions placed upon Jews, he quotes with approbation the words of the author:

“ ‘Perhaps a combination of circumstances as propitious as those which revealed Peter the Great, will send a leader who will, to transcendent power, add the greatest penetration of intellect; who will free a nation which, as noble as any other, is now languishing in poverty, ignorance, contempt, and a kind of slavery. Should such happen, I am convinced that reverence would believe it saw in the person of this prince, the wished-for approach of a Messiah; that eagerness would lay, at his feet, innumerable precious sacrifices; and that gratitude would erect to him, in the memory of descendants and in Jewish history, an ever-enduring monument.’ ” And he adds: “Truth and reason acquit the author (the Jew) of any accusation that might be brought by bitter prejudice.”

This gives the attitude that is so plainly marked in *Nathan the Wise* and appears more or less distinctly in *The Education of the Human Race*.

His attitude towards Deism and his essentially reverent nature are disclosed in Stück 137,²¹ for the year 1754, “*True Presentation of the Deistic Principles in two Conversations between a Sceptic and a Deist*.” He says, in part:

“The original of this small but precious work first appeared in the year 1711 and since then has been often reprinted. It seems that its author, who has remained unknown, was moved to defend the cause of Christianity in such a remarkable way, through the writings of Toland.

“He has, not a Christian, to take issue with the deist, but a sceptic, or, rather, a man, who has enough intellect and impartiality to allow the Christian religion not to be offended by any false accusations, and to set forth the arguments against the latter in their true light.

“This sceptic comes to the conclusion that deism is a mask and that the wearer, under it, seeks to repel abhorrent charges of atheism, or seeks the more adroitly to attack the Christian religion.”

²⁰ Lessing's *Sämtliche Werke*, v. 17, p. 53. Cotta Library.

²¹ *Ib.* p. 53.

His tolerant views, on the other hand, are revealed in another of the *Rezensionen*, dated 1754, and entitled *Rettung des Hieronymus Cardanus*. The significance that this composition has for us, is its exposition of the relationship of idolatry, Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism. The first three of these are again expounded in *The Education of the Human Race*, and the relation of the last three is revealed by *Nathan the Wise*. In addition to this, Lessing's independent viewpoint is interesting as showing how early he ventured to assail the bulwarks of conservatism. He says,²² after commenting on Cardan's varied career, the story of which reads much like that of Paracelsus:

"It would have been a miracle if such a rare spirit should have escaped the suspicion of atheism. What more is needed to bring that upon one than to think independently and to challenge natural prejudices? Seldom has anyone, indeed, been compelled, as was *Cardan*, to unite abhorrent propositions to a questionable life.

"An apparent slander, which is still incessantly carried from one book to another, compels me to bear this suspicion in mind. It is founded, as is well known, on three things: on a book which he is said to have written against the immortality of the soul; on his astrological folly in casting a nativity of God; and finally, on certain passages in his work *De Subtilitate*."

Lessing waives discussion on the first two of these and confines himself to the last. He then states the case against Cardan in the words of one of the latter's enemies as follows:

"In the eleventh book of his *De Subtilitate* he briefly compares the four chief religions (Idolatry, Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism) with each other, and, after he, without deciding for any, has allowed them to contend with each other, he concludes with these careless words: *igitur his arbitrio victoriae relictis*. Which in good German means that he wishes to leave to chance the side upon which the victory may fall."

After quoting Cardan on the four religions, Lessing inquires:

"Why should this attitude be really condemned? Is the comparison of the various religions in itself punishable, or is the strife merely over the manner in which Cardan has undertaken the matter?"

²² Lessing's *Sämtliche Werke*, v. 17, p. 63, *et passim*. Cotta Library.

"To maintain the first is not to be thought of for a moment. What is more necessary, is for one to convince himself of his belief, and what is less possible than conviction without previous proof."

And adds: "If the Christian is decreed to investigate only the doctrines of Christ, then the Mahometan is decreed to concern himself only with the doctrine of Mahomet. The former, it is true, would not thereby run the risk of changing a better belief for a worse, but the latter would, also, not have the opportunity of exchanging a worse, for a better. Yet why do I speak of risk? He must place a weak trust in the everlasting truths of God who fears, amidst lies, to maintain one against the other."

It was during this Berlin period, too, that Lessing produced *Sara Sampson*, based on the *Clarissa* of Richardson, in which he made another attack on rococo art, and endeavored to show, as Wordsworth did, fifty years later, that the lives of the humble contain adequate literary material.

In 1755 he went back to Leipsic and there made the acquaintance of von Kleist,²⁸ whose *Frühling* had elicited his warm applause. It was about this time that he wrote, in sentences, and very much in the style of his *Das Christentum der Vernunft*, a few thoughts entitled *Ueber die Entstehung der geoffenbarten Religion* which is of interest in connection with the notions of revealed religion that he published twenty-five years later in the *Education of the Human Race*. A few extracts will serve to show Lessing's position in regard to natural or positive religion and to demonstrate how much more weight he put on a man's real effort to bring out the best that was in him than on any creed. This is apropos when the chief idea of the Ring Story of *Nathan* is recalled.

"To acknowledge a God; to seek to entertain of him the worthiest conceptions; and to have respect for these conceptions in all our acts and thoughts—this is the most complete content of all natural religion.

"To this natural religion, according to the measure of his powers, is every man pledged and bound."

As this individual quality would cause insuperable individual differences, it is necessary to build up certain conventional conceptions which natural religious truths would inherently possess.

²⁸ The Tellheim of *Minna von Barnhelm*.

These conventional conceptions constitute a positive or revealed religion which receives its sanction from the fact that it is mediately from God. This inevitableness is the same in every positive religion, so that the inner truth of one is as great as the inner truth of the other. That, therefore, is the best revealed or positive religion which mingles with the natural religion the fewest conventionalities.

These notions are contained in the following:

"As, however, this measure (of the powers of the individual) would be different in each man, and the natural religion of each man also would differ, it has been thought necessary to build up a defence against the injury which this diversity might, with others, bring about; not, indeed, in the natural conception of freedom but in the condition of civic community.²⁴

"That is: as soon as religion was acknowledged to make for the general good, it became necessary to unite upon certain ideas and conceptions, and to ascribe to these conventional ideas and conceptions exactly the importance and necessity which the religious truths, naturally recognized, had of themselves.²⁵

"That is: it was necessary to construct, out of the religion of nature which was not fit for a general similar practice among men, a positive religion, just as there had been constructed out of the law of nature, and for the same cause, a positive law.

"This positive religion received its sanction through the authority of its founder, who announced that its conventionalities came just as certainly from God, though mediately through him (the founder), as the essential part of the religion came, immediately, through the reason of each individual.²⁶

"The necessity of a positive religion, by virtue of which the natural religion in each state became modified according to the natural and accidental constitution of the latter, I call the inner truth of the religion. And this inner truth is just as great in the one case as in the other.

"All positive and revealed religions are, accordingly, equally true and equally false: equally true so far as it was everywhere equally necessary for each to adjust himself to the varying ideas in order to bring consonance and unity into the revealed religion;²⁷ equally false, though not so obviously so, wherever one did adjust himself—adhered to the essential but weakened and repressed it.

²⁴ Cf. § 7, *et passim*. *Education of the Human Race*.

²⁵ Cf. §§ 36 and 37. *Ibid*.

²⁶ Cf. § 4. *Ibid*.

²⁷ Cf. § 14. *Ibid*.

“The best revealed or positive religion is that which unites the fewest conventional additions to the natural religion: which restrains in the slightest way the beneficent operations of the natural religion.”

These passages, though written in 1755-1760, bear such close analogy to some of those in the *Education of the Human Race* and *Nathan* that it becomes clearer than ever that Lessing's tractate and play were the result of a lifetime of reflection.

We see here, clearly, what Lessing means by Revelation, which is the “Education” of the tractate: we have the advantage of what amounts to a definition, and much light is shed on Revelation as it is to be interpreted in the *Education of the Human Race*. It is a divine thing, an inevitable thing, therefore it must exist in all natural religions, and when perceived cannot be gainsaid. It is not merely the written word of an ill-reported chronicler, but it is a spiritual effluence that suffuses a religion; it is the quintessence of religion; it is, so to speak, the real religious element of religion.

It is no surprise, after reading these sentences, to hear that in *Nathan* the plea is made for a tolerant consideration of the Jew and Mohammedan. Lessing, whose ideas from early to late life are remarkably consistent, simply could not have written otherwise.

This view of consistency is not maintained by all critics, as may be seen from the following extract from the introduction of Göring in the 17th volume of Lessing's *Sämtliche Werke*, where he says in regard to the *Ueber die Entstehung der geoffenbarten Religion*:

“It (the fragment called *On the Origin of Revealed Religion*) stands in essential contrast to Lessing's *Education of the Human Race*. In the first fragment, on the Moravians,²⁸ Lessing is the defender of a Christianity of action; in the second, *On the Christianity of Reason*,²⁹ he appears as the speculative theologian; in the present one³⁰ he reveals himself as a freethinker.”

And he adds: “In regard to Lessing's explanation that the inevitableness of a positive religion is its inner truth, Christian

²⁸ *Gedanken über die Herrnhuter*, *ib.* p. 15.

²⁹ *Das Christentum der Vernunft*, *ib.* p. 23.

³⁰ *Ueber die Entstehung der geoffenbarten Religion*, *ib.* p. 112.

Gross says, 'This inevitableness of the positive religion which is thus called its inner truth does not appear so just, and Lessing's performance on this head resembles positive scorn.'

But enough can be shown from all three of these productions to indicate that, in the main, the ideas that Lessing put forward in his last years were merely the mature fruits that had blossomed long before.

Göring himself explains the motive for the *Gedanken über die Herrnhuter* as follows:

"The fundamental thought of the work declares that man is made for action, not for reasoning, and shows, in a practical exposition of the development according to philosophy and theology, that religion is continually displaced by theology; as comfortable theory, with the sophistry of egotism, supersedes unpleasant fact."

It is true that Lessing in the course of his exposition says:³¹ "Man was created for doing and not for thinking," but he quotes Socrates with approval,³² "Foolish mortal, what is above thee, is not for thee! Look within. In thee are labyrinthine depths within which thou couldst profitably lose thyself. Here canst thou seek the most secret signs! Here canst thou learn things weak and things sturdy, the hidden paths and the public outburst of thy passions! Here stands the domain where are thy subject and thy king! Here is to be apprehended and controlled the one thing that thou shouldst apprehend and control: thyself."

This certainly proclaims in no equivocal way the attitude of individualism that we see in *Nathan* and, indeed, really in the *Education of the Human Race*. "The labyrinthine depths in which one can profitably lose himself," are those explored only when reason lights the way. Subtilising is imperative, despite the thesis of the article that religion fades as theology advances.

Lessing draws a parallel between the fate of philosophy which declined from the simple introspection of Socrates to the empty disputes of the scholars, and the fate of religion which, from the simple days of Adam, suffered a decline not halted even in our own. Even of Abraham's descendants he says:³³ "All became

³¹ *Sämtliche Werke*, v. 17, p. 16. *Gedanken über die Herrnhuter*.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ib.* p. 17.

unfaithful to the truth—some less than others, and the descendants of Abraham least. On this account, God vouchsafed to them a particular regard. But by degrees, even among them, the multitude of insignificant and self-selected customs became so great that only a few of them retained a correct conception of God. The remainder continued to cling to superficial illusions, and regarded God as a being that could not live unless they brought to him his morning and evening sacrifice.”

In section 6 of the *Education*, Lessing indicates that polytheism was a natural result of the early operations of the human reason.³⁴ Here, he implies that the schism arose through delusion. The important idea seems to be that both views lead to the necessity of revelation. He continues, in the *Gedanken*, as follows:

“Who could snatch the world from its gloom? Who could help it to conquer superstition? No mortal. θεος ἀπο μηχανης.

“Thus Christ came. May I be permitted to venture to regard him here only as a God-enlightened teacher.”

Thus revelation is personified in Christ who is the teacher.³⁵

The mission of Christ, he maintains, was to place religion back in her earlier and more spiritual bounds. He resumes, quoting: “God is a spirit whom thou shouldst adore in spirit! What does he urge more than that? and what tenet is mightier than this in binding all species of religion together?”

This passage, also, more than assumes that essential unity of spirit in all religions that finds expression in *Nathan*.

The *Das Christentum der Vernunft*, composed in 1753, three years after the *Gedanken*, is chiefly noticeable in this connection for its exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity which strongly resembles that in section 73 of the *Education*.

Some of the paragraphs of *Das Christentum der Vernunft* are:

3. Conception, volition, and creation are, in God, one act. It may be said: Everything God conceives, that, he also creates.

4. God can conceive himself in only two ways: either he thinks all his perfections simultaneously and himself as the central notion of them; or, he thinks his perfections separately,

³⁴ Cf. 6, *Education of the Human Race* and the *Ernst and Falk*.

³⁵ Cf. *Education of the Human Race*, §§ 59, 60 and 61.

each separate from the other and each, according to degrees, separated from him.

5. God conceived himself from eternity hither in all his completeness: that is, God created himself, from eternity, a being to whom there was lacking no perfection that he himself possessed.

6. This Being, the Writ calls God the Son, or, what might be better, the Son God: a God, because no attribute is lacking that belongs to God; a son, because, according to our notion, whatever presents something to the mind appears to have a certain antecedence to the presentation.

8. This Being may be called a picture of God but an identical picture.⁸⁶

9. The more two things have in common with each other, the greater is the harmony between them. The greatest harmony, therefore, must exist between two things which have everything in common, that is between two things which together are only one.

It is this Harmony which Lessing declares is the Holy Ghost of Scripture. It is worth while noting for two reasons: first, because it suggests Leibniz, as does indeed some of the rest of the exposition; and second, because it suggests the third element of the Trinity that is alluded to in the *Education* but there explained only in part. That is, the first two ideas are given as here, but the third is left unaccounted for.

Although this composition preceded Lessing's close study of Spinoza, there is something of the spirit of that philosopher in:

13. God conceived his perfection seriatim: that is, he created beings of which each one has something of his perfection, for, to repeat, with God, every thought is a creation.

14. All these beings together are called the world.

But the remaining sections indicate the influence of Leibniz, especially those immediately following, and remind one of Pope's borrowed philosophy in: "Of systems possible, if 'tis confest, that wisdom infinite must form the best."⁸⁷

15. God might have conceived his perfections distributed in endless forms. There could, thus, have been an infinite number of worlds if God had not, all along, conceived the most perfect

⁸⁶ Lessing uses the same arguments in the *Education*, § 73.

⁸⁷ Lessing himself, in *Pope, ein Metaphysiker!* shows that the *If*, here, has no significance.

and also thus among these forms conceived and thereby really made the most complete form.

He goes on to say that the most perfect way for God to think these worlds would be in a continuous series. Hence § 17:

They must make a series in which each member contains everything that the other members contain and a little more. But this little more never reaches the final limit.

In this way, the continuity of the world is shown to be perfect.

18. Such a series must be an infinite series, and, in this sense, the diuturnity of the world is incontestable.

We have in these two sections the same thought that in Leibniz produced the differential calculus with its infinite series and the thought of the true perfection of the world.

In the *Education*, Lessing is just as anxious, as he is here, to show the continuity of the world, its essential oneness.³⁸ We have, too, the monadistic notion of Leibniz which was to lead, within a very few years, to the complete intellectual independence of Lessing.

He continues by saying that God creates no absolutely separate thing, hence, § 22: "These simple beings are like limited gods, hence, also, their perfections must be similar to the perfections of God, just as parts to a whole."

This, like § 18, is a plea for the immortality of the soul, Spinozistic in aspect, but nevertheless earnest and deep-seated. The doctrine of immortality, Lessing finds, is the first chief contribution of Revelation.³⁹

In § 23 he puts forward an idea already referred to and making up § 73 of the *Education* where he affirms that God's perfect and necessary conception of himself is that figure of the Trinity usually known as the Son.⁴⁰ To the perfections of God belong this also: That he is aware of his perfection; and this: That he

³⁸ The *Education*, § 54.

³⁹ The *Education*, § 27 et post. 44, 58, &c.

⁴⁰ Cf. also: Die Seele, sagt Spinoza, ist mit dem Leibe auf eben die Art vereinigt, als der Begriff der Seele von sich selbst mit der Seele vereinigt ist. From "Durch Spinoza ist Leibniz nur auf die Spur der vorherbestimmten Harmonie gekommen." 1763, *Sämtliche Werke*, v. 19, p. 88.

can act according to his perfection. Both are equally the seal of his perfections.

Lastly, the note of individualism is struck again, and the necessary moral drawn, that makes the conception of duty fairly complete in § 26, where, having shown that those that are conscious of their perfections and possess the power of acting in propriety therewith, are entitled to be called "moral," i. e., capable of following a law, he adds:

"This law emanated from their own nature and can be no other than: Act according to thy individual perfections."

It is instructive, in this connection, to note what he had to say of Rousseau two years later in reviewing the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'ingalité parmie les hommes*,⁴¹ because it shows how thoroughly immersed in the Rousseau stream he was. After stating that Rousseau is as little satisfied with the condition of inequality in the world as he was, in his earlier essay, with the improvement conferred by the arts and sciences, Lessing goes on to laud the citizen of Geneva in these words: "He is, above all, still the keen philosopher, who regards no prejudice though it were never so popular, but who steadily approaches Truth without concerning himself with those appearances which, at every step, he must sacrifice in her name. His heart takes part in all his speculative efforts and he speaks, therefore, in a tone very different from that of a venal sophist whom self-interest or boasting has made a teacher of wisdom."

In 1758 Lessing went back to Berlin and worked on the *Literaturbriefe* and his *Fabeln*. In 1760 he went to Breslau and for several years divided his time between his library of 6,000 volumes, the study of Spinoza and the Christian Fathers, and the gaming table, around whose board he met the sprightly army officers that made up for him the zest and briskness his life craved.

In 1765 he returned to Berlin and wrote the *Laoköon* (1766) and *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767): the former, a critique that showed the natural limitations of poetry and of the plastic arts; the latter, a drama that reflected national spirit.

⁴¹ *Sämtliche Werke*, v. 19, p. 45, 1755.

In 1767 he betook himself to Hamburg and helped to establish a national theater. Here appeared his criticisms on dramatic art in those papers now called the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, the object of which was to free the German stage from the fetters of French art and to direct the public attention to the works of the Greeks and of Shakspeare.

In 1770 he took up his abode at Wolfenbüttel as librarian and published his essay on Berengarius of Tours after finding an MS. of that churchman in reply to Lanfranc on transubstantiation. In 1771 appeared his *Epigrams* and, in 1772, *Emilia Galotti* and essays on history and literature.

From 1774 to 1778, he published as *Wolfenbüttel Fragments*, various extracts from one, Reimarus, whose daughter had given Lessing some of her father's MSS. Reimarus had been professor of Oriental languages at Hamburg and had written a defence of the reasonable worship of God. Lessing published this in 1777 as a "fragment by an unknown hand," and appended to it the first half of his *Education of the Human Race*.

Goeze chose to take up cudgels in defence and very shortly the contestants were belaboring each other in doughty style. Lessing, in support of the position that the Bible was not necessary to a belief in Christianity, wrote *Eine Parabel, Axiomata*, and *Anti-Goeze*.

The *Parabel* is interesting in connection with the Ring story of Nathan, also a parable. In the *Parabel* there are a number of people each of whom possesses the plan of a beautiful temple of worship. The temple is discovered to be on fire and all of the people owning plans of it become much concerned lest the fane be destroyed. Instead, however, of concerting to put the fire out, each runs about with his plan, endeavoring to show thereon just what portion is being then destroyed by the flames. Finally, it is observed that the fabric is not on fire at all and that the fiery effect was given by the reflected light of the setting sun.

This stultification of the orthodox was ingenious enough to stir the religious polemics to their depths, and pamphlets began to muster. Lessing's skill in this "fabulous" literature was in no small way enhanced by his earlier composition of fables, and this adroitness, coupled with his learning and masterly knowledge of fence, made him a redoubtable antagonist.

It must not, however, be inferred that he made all of Reimarus's positions his own. He did not. He did not hesitate to criticise and to supplement: he drew a distinction between the religion of Christ and the Christian religion. Reimarus's contention was that the Old Testament was not written in order to reveal a religion since that book makes no mention of a future life. Lessing agreed in large measure with this view but insisted that there was revelation despite the absence of teaching on immortality and divine unity, because there was a *lesson* suited to the time.⁴²

In 1778-9 he wrote *Nathan the Wise*, and, in 1780, the *Education of the Human Race*.

From 1777 to 1780 he wrote *Ernst and Falk*, nominally on Freemasonry but really on broad philosophical topics. In the course of the dialogue, he discusses the question of the ideal state and shows how natural forces would tend to split up a large aggregate into smaller units possessing varying governments and religions. Though this result is inevitable, the inference is clear that the common origin of these varying beliefs is intended to plead for their reconciliation. That is, the world cannot be a unit unless toleration can urge it to be.

A few extracts will serve to show the general nature of the exposition and to indicate the attitude of Lessing in the years just preceding the composition of the *Education* and of *Nathan*.

Falk, to make his point, assumes the best possible political union, and says:⁴³

"We shall assume the best state; we shall assume that everybody in the world lives in this best state. Would they, therefore, all the people in the world, make only *one* state?"

Ernst admits that probably they would not.

This gives Falk his opening and he goes on to show that the parts would be, very much as at present, such as German, French, Dutch, Spanish, etc., each small state having its own interests. These various interests would collide and thus drive the parts asunder. Hence, paradoxically, that which united them would prove the strongest motive for dissolution. There would, too, be physical causes:

⁴² Cf. §§ 22 and 26 of the *Education*.

⁴³ *Zweites Gespräch*.

"Many of the smaller states would have very different climates, hence very different requirements and satisfactions, hence very different customs and practices, hence very different morals, hence very different religions."⁴⁴ * * * Then would men be, as now, Jews, Christians, Turks and the like."

This being the case, differences would be bound to exist as they do to-day when different sects found laws that are foreign to a natural religion.

In short, as a single state could not exist without a religion, and the chances of such a religion's having universal acceptance, being decidedly remote, the probability that such a general state might come into existence is very distant indeed. As he adds:⁴⁴ "One state: many states. Many states: many theories of state craft. Many theories of state craft: many religions."

These quotations show the breadth of Lessing's view. They justify Francke in saying⁴⁵ that Lessing's productions have "masculine vigor and intensity because they have republican fearlessness and monarchical discipline," "cosmopolitanism and nationality or freedom and discipline." That is, the vitality and spontaneity of Rousseau are tempered with Teutonic caution and thoroughness. His boldness of research, his independence of tradition, his optimism gleaming through the lines of the *Education of the Human Race* and of *Nathan*, reveal the idea of personality so prominent in German thought at the close of the eighteenth century and revealed in the English romantic movement from Cowper to Burns.

On the disciplinary side, he is allied to Locke, though his philosophy, unlike that of the English sage, is not static. Through the same agent, it might fairly be asserted that he was allied to Rousseau. For however individualistic the French essayist might appear to be, he would have, in his educational writings at least, his pupil Emile subjected to the inexorable discipline of "things." This conception of Lessing's allegiance, goes far towards explaining the self-renunciation of *Nathan* and the "obedience" of the *Education of the Human Race*.

Nor was he less Rousseau's disciple in the "republican fearlessness" which appears so admirably in his acceptance of Spinoza

⁴⁴ *Zweites Gespräch*. Cf. also Herder: *Ideen zur Philosophie der geschichte der Menschheit II. Achtes Buch*. Cotta Library.

⁴⁵ Kuno Francke, *Social Forces in German Literature*, p. 277 and 279.

as against Leibniz at a time when Spinoza himself was derided even by Leibniz, so that Elwes says⁴⁶ that the first real recognition of Spinoza, echoes of which appear in Goethe, Schleiermacher, Heine, Novalis, Hegel, Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley, came from Lessing. And his individualistic philosophy, with its collectivistic basis, the phase of thought so liberally expounded in Herder and in Kant, and finding renewed expression in Froebel and Dewey in such books as *The Child and the Curriculum*, and *School and Society*, is in no small measure owing to his study of the Amsterdam Jew. But he advanced beyond his mentor, for Spinoza sought "peace" and argued for an attainable goal, while Lessing, interested in processes rather than products, found truth in an endless progressive endeavor to arrive at the order of things.

This shows his interest in the process of "becoming," allies him to the great Königsberg philosopher, and accounts for his criticism and his toleration.

Toleration, as can be seen from Locke's *Letters Concerning Toleration*, was "in the air," but it is also true, that toleration and criticism are sisters, and Lessing was a born critic.⁴⁷

"Criticism is based," says Caird,⁴⁸ "on the idea that, below all special phases of knowledge, there is a general form of knowledge, or a general 'schema,'—to borrow an expression from Kant—which we carry along with us and by which, all, even the least instructed of men, impart a kind of unity to their experience." "It is a deeper kind of scepticism which goes back to the beginning of our thought * * * It suggests that the question at issue has certain presuppositions without the examination of which, it cannot be decided."

Lessing had the inestimable advantage of being an artist as well as a critic and, like Aristotle, could distinguish between the methods of art and the methods of logic.⁴⁹ This made him practical, and kept his criticism from becoming too airily philosophic, as were Plato's and Cousin's, and his art from becoming stereotyped.

⁴⁶ *Spinoza's Works*, Intro. p. vii.

⁴⁷ Francke, *Social Forces in German Literature*, pp. 270 and 275 for the significance of the *Laoköon* and *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*.

⁴⁸ *Critical Philosophy of Kant*, v. 1, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Cf. W. Basil Worsfold *Principles of Criticism*, p. 42.

But Lessing is not primarily a literary critic nor is it in that capacity that we are at present to judge him. He was not concerned, like Addison, in the midst of pseudo-classicism, for the true function of the imagination; he was not, like Bacon, concerned with foreshadowing the modern conception of the greater part of poetry as "thought as opposed to form;"⁵⁰ he was not, like Arnold, a confessed discoverer of literature as a criticism of life—yet he partook, after all, of the nature of all of these. He pleaded,⁵¹ even after praising Thomson's *Seasons*, that poetry has nothing to do with description; his greatest play achieved its chief distinction through its philosophic conceptions, and its criticism of life.

Rather did his criticism provide him with a point of view, and its profundity proved an able forerunner of the critical philosophy that was its philosophic successor.

⁵⁰ Cf. Walt Whitman.

⁵¹ Sir Robert Phillimore's *Laoköon*, Pref. p. 20.

PART II

The Education of the Human Race.

I. Analysis.

Hugo Göring, in the nineteenth volume of Lessing's *Sämtliche Werke* in the Cotta Library, writes the following introduction to Lessing's tractate:

"The first half of this profound treatise, Lessing published in 1777 with the four *Wolfenbüttel Fragments of an Unknown* (§§ 1-53). In the summer of 1777 he wrote the second half. In 1780 the conclusion appeared. In the meantime occurred the production of the dramatic poem *Nathan the Wise*.

"With the publication of the first 53 paragraphs, Lessing had remarked by way of self-criticism: 'The author of this work may not be, by any means, so heterodox as he, at first sight, appears to be.' He develops, in the course of his work, the relation of education to revelation; secures an insight into the stages of education and the progress of mankind; founds thereon his thoughts of true toleration; and arrives at an hypothesis of the transmigration of souls,¹ upon which, to be sure, some small worth is to be laid but in which is to be discerned in a very much less degree the effective power of Lessing's conception of the world.

"In regard to this, Kuno Fischer remarks: 'It needed no palingenesis to perceive in the religions the great educational stages of mankind and thence to attain that religious point of view which rises high above trammelled faiths and instigates the virtue of true toleration, the opposite of all vices.'

Whatever notion may be entertained of Lessing's religious attitude it must be admitted that he stands for the following conceptions:

1. That there is a law in human history;
2. That in regard to this law everyone has a right to use his reason in the most liberal way;

¹ Lessing's idea is rather a re-incarnation than a transmigration as this latter term is usually understood. Cf. §§ 94 and 95 of the *Education*.

3. That education is to be conceived of genetically but as a *ceaseless* process;
4. That work and effort are conditions necessary to the evolution of the individual;
5. That education is fundamentally ethic and democratic;
6. That man, "nature," and society are not disparate, but essentially one.

More specifically he implies:

1. No positive religion had the right to claim superiority;
2. Every historical religion has relative, if not absolute, worth;
3. Every historical religion is the evidence of the Divine in man;
4. The doctrines of Satisfaction and Original Sin are incidental;
5. This world is the "best of worlds."

The elements of Reimarus's doctrines that led to these conclusions, may be briefly stated as follows: The orthodox are inconsistent because they condemn reason, although reason is their means of demonstrating their religion; evidence in favor of revelation fades with each succeeding generation; no one faith can be adapted to the varying races; such a relatively small number of people ever heard of Christianity that it cannot have been divinely ordained for all; there are obvious defects in the truth of the narrative in the Bible; the Old Testament does not contain the most essential principles of revelation, i. e. the doctrine of immortality; the stories of the resurrection are at such variance that the whole story sounds invented.

Lessing, by no means agrees with Reimarus and takes issue with him definitely, arriving at such conclusions as:

Faith and reason are disparate: reason, having accepted revelation, is estopped from demanding that revelation be made "intelligible;" a revelation, if not for all men, may very properly be for the guidance of the largest number in the shortest time; the Old Testament contains a revelation despite the fact that it does not teach the immortality of the soul or the unity of God; a revelation does not have to contain absolute truth.

It is not improbable that something of the notion of the relation of reason to faith, and of education as a genetic process, Lessing

owed to Wieland who, in his essay *On the Place of Reason in Matters of Faith*, says:² "It is in the nature of things that a child, with every added year, comes to be less of a child. It has in it all that is needed to bring it to maturity, to the perfection of its individual nature; and it is wrong for its superiors, from selfish motives, to hinder its development. If what we call people is a sort of collective child (a current conception which is not altogether without foundation)³ then must be true of this child what is true of all children: it must be given every opportunity to develop into intelligent manhood. What need we fear from light? What can we hope from darkness? If diseased eyes are not able to bear the light, well, we must try to heal them and they will certainly learn how to bear the light."

Here we have what was to appear later as the "Culture Epoch Theory," made so much of by Ziller and the other disciples of Herbart, but clearly antedating them. Herder in his *Ideen* reveals the same idea, and Leibniz had it. It accounts for Lessing's conception of the Jewish race as a race that was in its childhood, in a stage to be taught by primers and stories, allegories in simple style and rhythmic repetitions. It gives ground for the assertion that revelation is still coming, an assertion that, as elsewhere pointed out, serves to show his relation with Kant and the later philosophers.⁴

The spiritual perfection which Lessing believes to be at the goal of human endeavor, is not to be won without effort. Knots and gnarls must live on friendly terms, as Nathan says in Act II, Sc. 5, and palingenesis must be accomplished by steadily increasing improvement. Lessing is thoroughly religious and sincere in this. He feels the covenant of man and the approach of an eternal gospel. He flourishes in an atmosphere that regards man as the necessary culmination of the world that will serve to make the whole a unit.

² Francke, *Social Forces &c.* p. 265

³ Cf. Hailmann's translation of Froebel's *Education of Man*, p. 18 n. for the doctrine in Spencer, Comte, Froebel, Pestalozzi, Richter, Goethe, Kant, Hegel, Herbart.

⁴ Cf. Buchner's *Kant's Educational Theory*, p. 58 and 60, for Kant's contribution to the doctrine of evolution, "racial education."

2. The Tractate.

THE EDUCATION OF THE HUMAN RACE.

1780.

All these things are true in certain people from the same standpoint from which, in certain other people, they are false.

Augustinus.

Preface of the Editor.

I made public the first half of this production in my *Communications*. I am now ready to have the remainder appear.

The author, in it, has taken his station on a height whence he believes he sees rather more than the prescribed path of his own day.

But he summons from the road no hastening traveler who merely wishes soon to reach his abode for the night. He does not demand that the prospect that has ravished him should delight every eye.

And so, permit me to think, he might be allowed to stand and muse there where he does stand and muse!

If he only have brought out of the immeasurable distance, which a soft evening glow neither quite encloses nor quite reveals, merely a hint of that about which I have often been puzzled!⁵

1.

What education is for the individual, revelation is for the whole human race.

2.

Education is revelation that affects the individual ; revelation is education which has affected and still affects the race.⁶

⁵For the confusing changes in the point of view that occur in this *Preface* note the circumstances under which the first half of the *Education* appeared. Cf. *ante*, Lessing's Life from 1774-1778 and the opening, *ante*, of Part II. Lessing, in this *Preface*, is speaking as an *editor* of the "fragment by an unknown hand." He refers to himself, however, here and there, both in the third person, as author, and in the first person, as editor.

⁶It is already apparent that the key-note of the tractate is individualism

3.

Whether to consider education from this point of view, can be of any value to pedagogical science, I will not now inquire. But, in theology, the conception of revelation as an education of the race may be of the utmost value and may serve to remove many difficulties.

4.

Education gives to man nothing that he could not evolve from himself, but gives it to him more swiftly and less arduously. Similarly, revelation gives to the race no things which the unaided human reason⁷ would not come upon by itself; but revelation has bestowed and is still bestowing, somewhat earlier, the most important of these things.

5.

And just as in education, since not everything can be brought to pass at once, the order of the development of the powers of man is not a matter of indifference; so God, in his revelation, felt constrained to maintain a certain system, a certain moderation.⁸

and all that that implies. But it is an individualism with social order. Cf. *Nathan*, Act I., Sc. 3.

Nathan. Must, dervise? Dervise, must?

Nay, no man must; why must a dervise then.

What must he, prithee?

Dervise. What is desired of him

In faith and honor, and he knows is right—

That, must a dervise.

Nathan. There you speak the truth;

Let me embrace you, man, and call you friend!

Indeed, Nathan feels so strongly opposed to the unreasonable individualism and Rousseauism of Al Hafi, the Dervise, who scorns Saladin's virtue when it appears contrasted with that monarch's oppression of his fellow-man in religious wars, that he (Nathan) actually fails to ask Al Hafi of the whereabouts of the Templar who has just saved from death the child that the Jew cares more for than for anything else in the world.

⁷ Cf. the keen irony in the following words of the unreasoning Patriarch of *Nathan*, Act IV, Sc. 2.

Patr. No man indeed should fail to use the reason

That God has given him—in its proper place.

* * * * *

Who would presume to let his reason question

The absolute authority of Him

Who made that reason—try the eternal law

Of heaven's high majesty by various rules of idle honor?

⁸ Lessing does not disregard the omnipotence of God here. He feels, merely, that God's design was decidedly *not* to bestow light all at once though it was in his power. Man had to *work out* his salvation. Note the implication of evolution and self-activity. Cf. too, § 6 *post*.

6.

Even if the primal man had been immediately endowed with a conception of a *single* God, yet this conception, imparted and not wrought out, could not possibly have endured in its integrity. As soon as the independent reason began to elaborate it, the former would subdivide the single infinite into many finites and give to each of the parts a characteristic mark.⁹

7.

Thus naturally arose polytheism and idolatry. And who knows for how many million years human reason might have blown about among these errors—notwithstanding, that everywhere and always, certain individual men knew that they were errors—if God had not pleased to give to reason, through a new impulse, a better direction.¹⁰

8.

But when he no longer could or would reveal himself to the *individual man*, he selected for his particular education an *individual people*, and that, the rudest and most barbarous, in order to begin with it from the beginning.¹¹

9.

This was the Hebrew people of whom it is not known in the least what kind of divine worship they had in Egypt, for such

⁹ Such passages as these show the influence of Leibniz, and suggest the later development of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Froebel. The independence of human reason is insisted on, and its constructive and definitive activity emphasized. It is assisted by God, Cf. 7, but only gradually and at those times only when it had reached the proper stage.

¹⁰ Only man's misconception betrays religions into subtleties and perversion, indicates Nathan in the celebrated Ring Scene, of *Nathan the Wise*. There is a basic unity, an ethical permanence, and we should forbear to accuse because we are all searching for truth. Cf. Spinoza's idea that falsity is merely a "negative conception," and that general notions are universal since the latter are an infinitude of specific intersecting mental images too numerous for the finite mind separately to retain. Since all "adequate" ideas are true and intersecting there is truth in all "religions." Note here Francke's statement, *Social Forces &c.*, p. 292, that *all* the rings make the owners pleasing to God and man.

¹¹ This, like § 5, is no derogation from God's omnipotence but an explanation of how far the human reason, left to itself, might depart from the true faith and how necessary instruction was. That the time spent in the effort to work out destiny had not been wasted, Cf. 18-20.

It must be admitted that, here and there, Lessing's attempt to make history fit his theory is a little forced.

condemned slaves were not allowed to take part in the divine worship of the Egyptians, and the God of their fathers had become absolutely forgotten by them.

10.

Perhaps it was that the Egyptians had expressly interdicted from them every god and all gods; had, in order to be able to tyrannize over them with a greater show of reasonableness, forced them to the belief that they might not have either god or gods, since to have such was a prerogative only of the dominant Egyptians. Do Christians treat their slaves, even now, very differently?

11.

To this rude people, accordingly, God caused himself to be proclaimed merely as the god of their fathers, in order at first to acquaint them with a god of their own and to inspire them with confidence.

12.

Through the miracles by which he led them out of Egypt and established them in Canaan, he attested himself directly afterwards as a god mightier than any other.¹²

13.

And while he continued to manifest himself as the most powerful of all—which, of course, only *one* can be—he accustomed the people gradually to the conception of a *unitary God*.

14.

But how far, indeed, was this conception of a unitary God from the true transcendental conception of a unified God which reason so much later first learned with certainty to resolve from the conception of an infinite God.

15.

To the true conception of a unitary God—even if the better part of the people more or less approached it—the people, as a whole,

¹² For Lessing's attitude towards miracles, Cf. various sections *passim* and § 80 n.

however, could not for a long time raise themselves, and this was the only true reason why they so often abandoned their one god and thought to find the One (that is, the mightiest), in some other god of some other peoples.

16.

But for what kind of *moral* education was such a rude people, unaccustomed to abstract thoughts, and so completely childish, fit? For no other than that suitable to the age of childhood: the education by means of immediate appeals to the senses through punishments and rewards.

17.

Hence, here, too, education encounters revelation. Not as yet could God give to his people any other religion, any other law, than one through the observance or disregard of which they hoped or feared here, upon earth, to be happy or unhappy. For their vision did not penetrate beyond this life. They knew of no immortality of the soul: they yearned for no future life. To have revealed so early to them those things for which their reason was so immature—what would that have been in God other than the mistake of the conceited pedagogue who prefers, instead of firmly grounding his pupil, to hasten him along and to boast of him.

18.

But, it will be asked, for what purpose was this education of such a primitive people, a people with whom God was compelled to begin absolutely from the beginning? I answer: In order, later on, to be able to use, with greater certainty, as instructors of all other peoples, several of them. He developed in them the future teachers of the human race. They were Jews: they must have been Jews; they must have been men from a people educated in that way.¹³

19.

For, when the child had grown up, amid buffetings and endearments, and had arrived at an age of comprehension, the

¹³ Cf. the lesson of *Nathan*: Toleration springing from conflict, from effort that brings self-renunciation. Kuno Fischer, in his essay on *Nathan the Wise*, shows by reference to this idea why the hero of Lessing's dramatic poem was a Jew.

Father thrust it at once into foreign parts and there it realized immediately the benefits it enjoyed but had not recognized in its Father's house.

20.

While God, through all the degrees of a childhood education was leading his chosen people, the other nations of the earth made their way according to the light of reason. Most of them were left far behind by the chosen people, but some got ahead of it. This, too, happens in the case of children that are allowed to grow up by themselves: many remain absolutely rude; others develop themselves to an astonishing extent.¹⁴

21.

As, however, these more fortunate few prove nothing against the usefulness and necessity of instruction, so do the few barbarous peoples who appeared in their conception of God to have an advantage up till then over the chosen people, prove nothing against revelation. The child of education starts with steps that are slow but sure; it comes up late with many a more fortunately organized child of nature but it overtakes it nevertheless and is thereafter never again overtaken by it.¹⁵

22.

Similarly (the doctrine of the unity of God, which is found and not found in the books of the Old Testament, being laid aside), I say, the fact that at least the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the accompanying doctrine of punishment and reward in a future life, are not found therein, is just as little proof against the divine origin of these books. Notwithstanding this, there may be perfect truth there with all the miracles and prophecies therein. For, let us suppose that these doctrines were not only *incomplete* but that they were not even *true*; let us suppose that, for man, everything was over with this life—would the existence of God be the less demonstrated thereby? Would God appear thereby less free? Would it thereby

¹⁴ Cf. § 76 n. For other sections that reiterate the part of "reason" cf. 35, 36, 37, 55, 63, 65 &c.

¹⁵ Cf. § 76 n.

be less seemly in God to take charge of the temporal destinies of some one people of this transitory human race? The miracles which he performed for the Jews, the prophecies which, through them, he had chronicled, were by no means merely for the few mortal Jews in whose time they had happened and had been recorded. He had his aims, at the same time, in regard to the whole Jewish race, the whole human race, which, perhaps, may remain here upon earth forever, though every individual Jew, every individual man, were to perish irredeemably.¹⁸

23.

Again. The absence of these doctrines from the writings of the Old Testament proves nothing against their divinity. Moses, although the sanction of his law extended only to this life, was certainly sent from God. Why should it extend farther? He was sent only to the *Hebrew* people, the Hebrew people *of that time*, and his mission was perfectly suited to the knowledge, capacities, and the inclinations of the Hebrew people *then living*, as well as to the destiny of the *coming* race. That is enough.

24.

So far ought Warburton to have gone and no farther. But the learned man overstrained the bow. Not content that the absence of these doctrines was no impeachment of the divine mission of Moses, he sought to evince that mission through that very absence. If he had only sought to draw his proof from the appropriateness of such a law (cf. 23) to such a people! But he sought refuge in a continuous miracle, unbroken from Moses to Christ, according to which God made every individual Jew just as happy or unhappy as he was obedient or disobedient to the law. This miracle was to be regarded as making up the lack of those doctrines without which no state could endure, and such compensation, as demonstrating what the omission, at first sight, seemed to gainsay.

¹⁸ Spinoza in chapter 2 of the *Politico-Theological Tractate* points out how limited the early Jew's idea of God was. Conceptions of omniscience and omnipresence were of slow growth. Also, note *post* §§ 85 to 100.

25.

How fortunate it was that Warburton¹⁷ could not verify, could not make probable, through any means, this persisting miracle in which he placed the reality of the Jewish theocracy. For had he been able to do that, then had he really made the difficulty insuperable—to me at least. For then, that which had been intended to reestablish the divinity of the mission of Moses would have made that matter doubtful, which God, it is true, did not intend to communicate, but which, also, he certainly did not intend to make difficult.

26.

My explanation lies in the antitype of revelation.¹⁸ A primer for children may very well pass over in silence this or that important element of the science or art that is being set forth, which element, in the judgment of the teacher is not adapted to the capacities of the children for whom he wrote. But the primer must, under no circumstances, contain anything that will divert the children from, nor obstruct the paths to, the withheld important elements. Rather must all the avenues be left scrupulously free for them; and to cause them to be directed from even a single one of these paths so that they might traverse it later, would alone serve to transform a defect of the primer into an actual fault.

27.

Thus the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and future reward were properly enough left out of the writings of the Old Testament, the primers of the Israelites, a rude people undisciplined in thought. But those writings could under no circumstances contain anything that might delay in any wise the people for whom they were written, on the road to this great truth. And what would have, to say the least, impeded the people more, than to have that marvelous recompense promised in this very life, and promised by one who makes no promises that he does not execute.

¹⁷ Cf. The amusing and acute analysis of the theories of Warburton, "the attorney-general of God," in Leslie Stephen's, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*.

¹⁸ I. e., Education.

28.

For, although the unequal distribution of the goods of this life, in which little attention seems to have been paid to Virtue and Vice, is not the strongest proof of the immortality of the soul and a future life in which that lack of discrimination will be removed, it is nevertheless certain that without that difficulty, human intelligence, for a long time, possibly never, would not have arrived at better and more convincing proofs. For what would have been able to force it to seek these stronger proofs? Mere curiosity?¹⁹

29.

This or that Israelite, to be sure, might have extended to each individual member, those divine promises and threats which concerned the political aggregate and might have persisted in the firm belief that whoever was pious would also be happy, and that whoever was unhappy was bearing the punishment for his misdeeds, which punishment would immediately transmute itself again into blessing as soon as he abandoned his transgression. Such a person appears to have written Job for the plan of it is quite in this spirit.

30.

But it was impossible that daily experience should strengthen this belief, for, had it done so, all would have been over for ever, so far as the recognition and acceptance of the still unimparted truth was concerned, *for ever*, for the people that had such an experience. For, if the pious man was absolutely happy, and in conjunction with his happiness it was necessary that no frightful thoughts of death should interrupt his tranquility, that he should die old and *completely satisfied with life*, how could he yearn for another life; how could he reflect upon that for which he did not yearn? But, if the pious man did not reflect thereon, who then was to reflect? the transgressor? who felt the penalty

¹⁹ Lessing is a thoroughgoing disciplinarian here. Difficulties to overcome is the material of education. The idea is in accord with Lessing's words as given by Sime in his *Life*, vol. 2, p. 324: "If it was true that there was an art that made us acquainted with the future we should rather not know it; if it was also true that there was a religion which put us beyond doubt as to the next life we should rather not listen to this religion."

of his evil deeds and who, if he execrated this life, gladly renounced that other life?²⁰

31.

Much less did it matter that here and there an Israelite directly and explicitly denied the immortality of the soul and future recompense because the law did not concern itself therewith. The denial of an individual—though he were a Solomon—did not halt the progress of the general understanding and was, in and for itself, a proof that the nation had taken a great step nearer the truth. For individuals deny only what the many are beginning to reflect upon, and to reflect upon that which has been theretofore absolutely ignored is half way to knowledge.

32.

Let us also acknowledge that it is an heroic obedience to observe the laws of God merely because they are the laws of God²¹

²⁰ Lessing's conception of education as a discipline appears in *Nathan*, Act I, Sc. 1, where Nathan, transcendently educated because he is The Wise, patiently accepts Daja's accusations, and the loss of his sons, &c. His gentle reminder, Act I, Sc. 2,

But have you learned
That pious ecstasies are easier far
Than virtuous deeds

suggests Spinoza's assertion that, as the will has no validity apart from acts of volition, the will is coterminous with understanding, or is understanding in another mode. A view which not only foreshadows the philosophy of Schopenhauer and the volitional psychology of Dewey, but may be conceived as basing the practical teaching of Nathan in his plea for the validity of the religions, *Nathan* Act III, Sc. 7. The latter are consanguineous because of the identity of intellect and will that in them must lie.

Cf. Sime's *Life* v. I, p. 94. Lessing "over and over again returns to the principle that conduct, not belief, is the more important thing, and that mere dogmatic teaching is of no avail if dissociated from practical goodness."

²¹ Lessing inclines to the Kantian view that a supersensible God is demonstrable though not, of course, *ex vi termini*, knowable, through experience. Cf. *Nathan* Act III, Sc. 1.

All the more consoling was the lesson
That faith in God depends not on the views
We entertain of him.

Cf. Sime's *Life*, Vol. I, p. 95, quoting Lessing: "The attempt to put together a single religion before men have been brought to the sincere exercise of their duties is an empty fancy."

The whole ground work of *Nathan* is self-renunciation, the effect of which is heightened by contrast with the self-centered Daja, the grasping Patriarch and the misconceived democracy of the dervise, Act I, Sc. 3, Act II, Sc. 9, whom Nathan in Act I, Sc. 3, rallies with:

If your heart continues dervise, why
"The fellow in the state" is but a cloak.

and not because He has here and there promised to reward the observer of them: to observe them even though a future reward be entirely doubted and an earthly one also is not wholly certain.

33.

A people trained in this heroic obedience towards God, should it not be destined, should it not be fitted, above all others, to carry out especial divine plans? Let the soldier who offers blind obedience to his chief, become convinced also of the sagacity of his leader, and say what this leader would not dare, with him, to undertake.

34.

Yet the Jewish people in their Jehovah had revered rather the mightiest than the wisest of all gods: had feared him as a jealous god rather than loved him. This is a proof, too, that the conceptions which they had of their most exalted, unitary god were not exactly those which we hold for true. But now the time had arrived when these conceptions of theirs were to be broadened, ennobled, rectified. To which end, God made use of a perfectly natural means,²² of a better and more accurate measure by which the nation secured opportunity to esteem him.

35.

Instead of esteeming him, as till then, only in contrast to the miserable idols of the small rude neighboring tribes with whom they lived in constant jealousy, they began, in captivity under the wise Persians, to estimate him against the being of all beings, as one recognized and honored by a disciplined reason.²³

Notice the reiteration of the idea of renunciation in all of the noble characters: in the Sultan's pardon of the Templar; in the Templar's effort to avoid reward; in Nathan's patience under the loss of sons and wife. Sittah, more limited, shows it mainly toward her brother. Cf. § 80.

²² I. e. Reason, § 35.

²³ Lessing's attitude toward Reason, in *Nathan*, appears very clearly from his contemptuous portrait of the Patriarch who remarks sanctimoniously, Act IV, Sc. 2:

There the knight may see
How pride of human reason will mislead
In matters spiritual.

And from the words of the Templar, Act IV, Sc. 2, *ib.*:

The girl is trained, 'tis said,
In no religion, rather than his own;
And has been taught no more nor less of God
Than satisfies her reason.

36.

Revelation had conducted their reason; and now reason suddenly illuminated their revelation.

37.

This was the first mutual service which they performed for each other. And such a reciprocal influence is, far from being ill-fitting to the author of them, so appropriate that without it each of them would have been useless.

38.

The child, sent among strangers, saw other children who knew more and lived more fittingly, and asked himself abashed: "Why do I not know that too, why do I not live thus? Ought not this to have been imparted to me, ought not I to have been restrained in my Father's House?" Then he again seeks out his primer, which long since had become tiresome to him, in order to cast the blame upon the primer. But behold, he realizes that the blame does not lie in the books: that the blame of not long ago knowing this very thing and living this very way, is solely his own.

39.

As the Jews in their Jehovah by this time recognized, through the means of the purer, Persian doctrine, not merely the greatest of all national gods, but God; as they, so much more readily could find him and point him out to others as he really was in their reproduced sacred writings; as they evinced aversion to all sensuous representations of this conception, or were advised, at all events, in these writings to have an aversion just as great as the Persian had always had—what wonder is it that they found favor in the eyes of Cyrus with a divine worship which he recognized, it is true, as being far from pure Sabeism but still far superior to the gross idolatries which, instead of the newer conception, had taken possession of the forsaken country of the Jews.

40.

Thus enlightened in regard to their own unrecognized treasures, they returned and became an entirely different people, whose

first care it was to make this enlightenment among them, enduring. Soon apostacy and idolatry were no longer thought of amongst them. For, though it is possible to be unfaithful to a national god, to God, when once he has been recognized, never.²⁴

41.

The theologians have sought variously to explain this complete change in the Jewish people, and one of them, who has very well pointed out the inadequacy of all these different explanations, wished, in conclusion, to advance "the apparent fulfilment of the written and oral prophecies concerning the Babylonish captivity and release from it," as the true cause of the change. But this reason, also, can be the true one only so far as it implies the now newly exalted conceptions of God. The Jews must now, for the first time, have learned that to perform miracles and to prophesy the future belongs only to God. They had formerly ascribed both of these powers also to the false gods—a policy which made even miracles and prophecies have upon them a weak and transient impression.

42.

Without doubt, the Jews, under the Chaldeans and Persians, became more familiar with the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. They became more familiar with it in Egypt, in the schools of the Greek philosophers.

43.

But as this doctrine of immortality did not have the same status in relation to their sacred writings that it had had with the doctrine of the unity and attributes of God; as the former doctrine was crudely overlooked by this sensual people, though the latter would be sought; as *anticipatory exercises* of the latter were still necessary; and as only *allusions* and *hints* had been given—belief in the immortality of the soul naturally could never become the belief of the whole nation. It was, and remained, the belief of only a certain sect of them.

44.

An *anticipatory exercise* of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, I call, for example, the divine threat to inflict the sins

²⁴ Cf. § 7 n.

of the fathers on his children even to the third and fourth generation. This accustomed the fathers to live in thought with their furthest descendants and to anticipate the misfortune which they had brought upon these innocent ones.

45.

An *allusion*, I call that which was designed to excite curiosity and to occasion a question, such as the frequently reiterated phrase: *to be gathered to his fathers*, for *die*.

46.

A *hint*, I call that which already contains some germ, out of which the truth, still withheld, may develop. Of this kind, was the inference of Christ from the appellation: *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*. This hint appears to me certainly capable of being developed into a convincing proof.

47.

In such anticipations, allusions, and hints, consists the *positive* perfection of a primer; just as the *negative* perfection consists in the property, previously pointed out, of not obstructing or making more difficult the path to the truths not yet imparted.

48.

Add to this, moreover, the dress and the style²⁵ —

(1. The dress, in allegories and instructive single instances, of the abstract truths which were not, too cursorily, to be passed over, and were told as if they had actually happened. Of this nature are: the creation, in the picture of an increasing day; the origin of moral evil, in the story of the forbidden tree; the source of many tongues, in the history of the tower of Babel, etc.

49.

2. The style, sometimes plain and simple, sometimes poetical, always full of tautologies, but the style of those that think shrewdly and while they at one time appear to say something else, are really saying the same thing; at another time appear to

²⁵ § 50 completes the sentence.

say the same thing though really they imply, or can be understood as implying, something else.)

50.

And you have all the meritorious attributes of a primer, for children as well as for a childlike nation.

51.

But each primer is only for a certain age. To delay over it longer than was the intention, the child that has outgrown it, is pernicious. For, in order to do this in a way anywise profitable, more must be put into it than is in it; more must be taken out of it than it can contain. The allusions and hints must be too much sought and fondled; the allegories must be rattled empty; the illustrations interpreted too straitly. This gives the child a narrow, skewed, meticulous understanding; it makes him full of mystery, superstitions, full of contempt for all that is comprehensible and easy.

52.

The very way²⁸ in which the Rabbins treated their sacred books: the very character which they imparted to the spirit of their people!

53.

A better teacher must come and snatch from the child's hands the spent primer. Christ came.

54.

That part of the human race which God had willed to comprehend in one plan of education (he had, however, willed to unite in such a plan only that part which, through language and mode of action, through government and other natural and political relationships, had already united itself), was ready for the second great step of education.

55.

That is, this part of the human race had gone so far in the exercise of its reason that it required and could utilize for its

²⁸ I. e., This (§ 51) *was* the very way, etc.

moral actions, motives nobler and worthier than were the temporal rewards and punishments that had hitherto been its incentives. The child had become a boy. Tid-bits and toys gave way to the growing desire to become just as free, just as honored, just as happy as he saw his elder brethren were.

56.

The better ones of that part²⁷ had long since been accustomed to let themselves be governed by a *shadow* of such nobler motives. In order to be perpetuated after this life, merely in the recollection of their fellow townsmen, the Greeks and Romans did everything.

57.

It was time that another, *true* life after this life, should win an influence over his²⁸ actions.

58.

And so Christ became the first *trustworthy, practical* teacher of the immortality of the soul.

59.

The first trustworthy teacher—trustworthy through the prophecies that appeared fulfilled in him; trustworthy in the miracles which he performed; trustworthy through his own reanimation after a death by which he had sealed his doctrines. Whether we now can prove this resurrection or these miracles, I shall ignore as I shall ignore who the person of this Christ was. All that might have been of importance at that time in the *acceptance* of his doctrines, is no longer of importance in the recognition of their truth.

60.

The first *practical* teacher—for it is one thing to surmise, wish for, and believe in the immortality of the soul as a philosophic speculation; another, to formulate, in accord therewith, the inner and outer acts.

²⁷ I. e. the elder brethren.

²⁸ I. e. the youth's.

61.

And this at least Christ taught now for the first time. For, although among many nations the belief had already been introduced before him, that evil actions would yet be punished in that life, they were, nevertheless, only such actions as wrought injury to the civil community, and therefore already had their punishment in the civil community. To recommend an inner purity of heart with regard to another life was reserved alone to him.

62.

His disciples have faithfully propagated these doctrines. And had the former no other merit than that of procuring a more general circulation among many peoples of a truth which Christ appeared to have intended for the Jews alone, they ought, for that very reason, to be considered among the fostering benefactors of the human race.

63.

How could it have been otherwise than that they should confuse this *one* great doctrine with other doctrines whose truth was less illuminating, whose use was less important. Let us not blame them for that, but rather earnestly inquire whether these very intermingled doctrines did not become a new directing impulse to human reason.

64.

At all events, it is evident that the New Testament scriptures in which these doctrines were, after some time, preserved, provided and still provide the second, better primer for the human race.

65.

They, more than all other books, during the last seventeen hundred years, have exercised the human reason; more than all other books, have illumined it; were it, only through the light which the human intellect carried into them.

66.

It would have been impossible for any other book to have become so generally known among such different peoples. And it

is incontestable that the human reason has been more advanced by the fact that such totally unlike modes of thought have exercised themselves on this very book, than if each nation, for itself particularly, had had its own primer.

67.

It was also most necessary that each nation should accept this book for some time, as the ne plus ultra of its knowledge. For in that way must the boy also first regard his primer, so that the impatience merely to be finished may not urge him on to things for which he has not yet laid the foundation.

68.

And, what is still most necessary—take heed, thou better prepared one, thou that pausest restlessly, to fume on the last page of this primer, take heed against letting thy weaker fellow-pupil mark what thou faintly perceivest, or already beginnest to see.

69.

Until they are up with thee, these weaker fellow-pupils, rather turn thyself once more to this primer and seek whether that which thou takest only for involution of method, or a temporary expedient in the teaching, is really not something more.

70.

Thou hast seen, in the childhood of the human race, in regard to the doctrine of the unity of God, that God immediately revealed, or permitted and brought out, mere truths of reason; that mere truths of reason were for some time taught as immediately revealed truths, in order to disseminate them more rapidly and to establish them more firmly.

71.

Thou experiencest the same thing in the boyhood of the human race in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The latter, in the second, better primer, is *preached* as revelation, not *taught* as the result of human conclusions.

72.

Just as we can henceforth do without the Old Testament in the doctrine of the unity of God, so, by degrees, we begin to be able to do without the New Testament in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Could there not be foreshadowed, in this New Testament, other similar truths which we are to regard in astonishment until they learn to induct reason from her other evidenced truths and with them to combine?

73.

For example, the doctrine of the Trinity. What if this doctrine, after endless wanderings to and fro, should only bring the human understanding finally to recognize that God cannot possibly be *one* in the sense in which finite things are *one*; that his unity must be a kind of transcendental unity which does not exclude a kind of plurality. At all events, must not God have of himself the most complete conception; that is, a conception in which there is everything that is in him? Should there, however, be everything that is in him if there was, of his *essential reality*, as well as of his other attributes, merely a conception, merely a possibility? This possibility exhausts the nature of his other attributes, but does it do so for his essential reality? I think not. Accordingly, God can have either no possibly complete conception of himself, or this complete conception is just as essentially real as he is himself. Certainly, my image in the mirror is nothing but a mere representation of me because it has of me only that from which rays of light fall upon its surface. But if this picture had *everything*, everything without exception, which I myself have, would it then be still an empty representation, or rather a true duplicate of my personality? If I believe I recognize a similar duplication in God, my error may not be as great as my words are feeble, in the expression of my ideas. And so much remains undeniable; that they that wished to make the notion of this conception popular, could hardly have expressed themselves more aptly or more comprehensibly than by the appellation of a *Son* whom God created from eternity.

74.

And the doctrine of original sin. What if everything finally persuaded us that man, when on the *first and lowest* round of his humanity, is by no means such master of his actions as to be able to follow moral laws.

75.

And the doctrine of the Son's Satisfaction. What if everything finally compelled us to suppose that God, despite that original inability of man, nevertheless preferred to give him moral laws, and preferred to forgive him all trespasses in consideration of his *Son* (that is, in view of the self-subsisting completeness of all His perfections contrasted with which and in which each imperfection of the individual disappears), than not to give him those laws and exclude him from all moral blessedness which, without moral laws, cannot be conceived.

76.

It is not to be objected that such subtleties over the mysteries of religion are interdicted. The word "mystery" connoted in the early days of Christianity, something quite different from what we now understand by it. And the development of revealed truths into truths of reason is absolutely necessary if the human race is to be helped by them. When they were revealed, they were, indeed, no truths of reason; but they were revealed in order to become so. They were like the *Facit* which the arithmetic master cries to his pupils so that they may in some wise be able to direct themselves in calculation. Were the pupils to content themselves with the announced *Facit* they would never learn to calculate, and the aim with which the good master gave them a clue for their work, would be defeated.²⁹

²⁹ The cultivation of revealed truths with truths of reason is thus declared to be absolutely necessary. In *Nathan*, Lessing implies that too much weight is given by Christians to formulas and not enough to ideas. Thus Sittah says, Act II, Sc. 1, after the chess game,

The name (Christianity) is all their pride.

And Al Hafi in Act II, Sc. 9, says, in his over-wrought zeal:

Who cannot resolve
Upon the instant for himself to live,
Remains forevermore the slave of others.

77.

And why should we not also be able to be conducted by a religion (notwithstanding that its historical truth, if you will, appears so doubtful), to more exact and better conceptions³⁰ of the divine Being, of our nature, of our relations to God—conceptions to which the human reason would, of itself, never have arrived.

78.

It is not true that speculations on these things ever caused harm and became noxious to the civil community. This reproach is not to be made to speculations but to the ignorance, to the tyranny that restrained these speculations, that did not permit original speculations to men that had them.³¹

79.

Such speculations—let them turn out as they will individually—are as a general thing, on the contrary, incontestibly the most *appropriate* exercises of the human understanding so long as the human heart is, in general, capable at best of loving virtue only on account of its eternal blessed consequences.³²

80.

For, moreover, in this selfish state of the human heart, to incline to exercise the understanding only on those things which

³⁰ I. e., The Trinity, Original Sin, and the Son's Satisfaction, and perhaps what Edward Caird refers to in his *Social Philosophy and Religion of Comte* when he says in his Preface, quoting Comte, "The individual man is a mere abstraction and there is nothing real but humanity," adding, "The same change (of the point of view) brings with it a restoration of religion. The 'objective' or absolute God, the God who made all things work together for good to His creatures, has disappeared with the fictions of childhood. But his place has been taken by Humanity conceived as a great providential existence which sustains and controls the life of the individual man and in which he finds a sufficient object for all his devotions."

³¹ Cf. for toleration and individualism, §§ 80 and 87 and the very thesis of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico Politicus*, that freedom of thought should be granted and may not be withheld without danger. Cf. too, *ante*, note to Voltaire's words, quoting Royce.

³² I. e. Such speculations would not be necessary if the human heart loved virtue for its own sake. But with the human heart benighted as it is, we must speculate beyond mere corporal needs. Cf. § 80.

concern corporeal needs, would blunt it rather than whet it. It positively will be exercised on spiritual concerns if it is to attain to complete clarification and bring out that purity of heart which qualifies us to love virtue for its own sake.⁸³

81.

Or shall the human race never reach this acme of clarification and purity? Never?

82.

Never? Let me not, All-Bountiful, think such blasphemy! Education has its *goal*, not less for the race than for the individual. What is to be educated, is to be educated for *something*.

83.

The flattering prospects which are revealed to the youth, the honor, the well-being, which are held glittering before him—what are they but means to educate him to become a man who, when these prospects of honor and well-being fade away, may be capable, even then, of doing his duty.⁸⁴

84.

Human education aims at that, and shall divine education not stretch so far? What art succeeds in doing for the individual,

⁸³ Cf. §§ 32, 83. Nathan, Act I, Sc. 9, pleads for the immanent spirit in the real, when he replies to Recha's inquiry as to whether he has not taught her to believe in God and miracles:

Yes,

And he loves you; and hourly, miracles
For you and such as you, is working now—
From all eternity, has worked them for you.

For further indications of Spinozistic immanentism Cf. Act I, Sc. 2:

For God rewards even here

The good that here is done.

and Act III, Sc. 2:

Where e'er he (Moses) stood, 'twas in God's presence.

The reference to Spinoza is Chapter I. *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

Note, too, Kant's words: "Mankind must not remain in this raw state, but *must* develop, progressing in the direction of reason, law, will, freedom, morality." Buchner's *Educational Theory of Emanuel Kant*, p. 60.

And Cf. Wieland's essay *On the Place of Reason in Matters of Faith* quoted by Francke in *Social Forces &c*, p. 265.

⁸⁴ The reiteration of this idea (§§ 32, 80) suggests the categorical imperative, action, and will to do, of Kant's teaching.

shall nature not succeed in doing for the whole? Blasphemy!
Blasphemy!

85.

No! It will come, it will surely come, the time of perfection, when man—the more convinced his understanding feels of an ever better future—will not, however, have to borrow from this future, motives for his actions; when he will do the good because it is the good and not because there were imposed upon it arbitrary rewards which were earlier intended merely to steady his inconstant vision and strengthen it to recognize the inner, better rewards.³⁵

state of
perfection.

86.

It will surely come, the time of a *new, eternal gospel* which is promised, in the primers of the New Covenant, to us.

87.

It may be that even certain visionaries of the thirteenth and fourteenth century had caught the gleam of this new, eternal gospel and erred only in announcing its dawn as so near.³⁶

88.

Perhaps their *threefold age of the world* was no mere empty vagary, and certainly they had no evil aim when they taught that the New Covenant must become just as *antiquated* as the Old. There remained even with them always the same economy of the same God, always—to let them use my phrase—the same plan for the universal education of the human race.

89.

But they were too hasty in that they thought they could make their contemporaries, who had hardly outgrown childhood, with-

³⁵ Cf. the buoyancy of this with Nathan's words, Act II, Sc. 5.

I know a good man's motives, and I know
Good men are everywhere.

³⁶ Cf. Royce, "Jesus, advancing on the Stoics, placed the basis in the kinship of man as *sons* of God. Thus morality is not dependent on a fiat of God but on a *necessary* relation of God's creatures to God. Love is the basis." *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*: Search for a Moral Ideal, p. 39.

And note the dialogue of Nathan and the Templar, Act II, Sc. 5, where Nathan says:

Knots and gnarls must live on friendly terms.

out enlightenment, without preparation, at one stroke, men, worthy of their *third age*!

90.

And this very thing made them visionaries. The visionary often projects very true glances into the future; but he cannot wait for this future. He wishes this future expedited, and expedited through him; that for which nature takes milleniums is to mature in the instant of his life. What will he have of it if that which he recognizes as the better does not become the better in his life time? Does he return? Does he think he will return? Wonderful only that this ecstasy amongst visionaries does not become more the custom.

91.

Pursue thy secret path, everlasting Providence, only let me not, because thou art hidden, despair of thee. Let me not despair of thee even if thy steps appear to me to retreat. It is not true that the shortest line is always straight.

92.

Thou hast upon thine eternal way so huge a burden, thou hast so many asides to take! What if it were as good as proved that the great, slow wheel which brings the race nearer its perfection, received its motion only from smaller, swifter wheels of which each furnishes its individual share.

93.

It cannot be otherwise! The very path upon which the race has attained its perfection sooner or later every individual man must have travelled. "To have travelled in one and the same life? Can he have been in the self-same life a sensual Jew and a spiritual Christian? Can he have accomplished both in the very same existence?"⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Note the suggestion of the culture epochs. But Lessing's conception of a cyclic generation, unlike Bolingbroke's of his own time or the Heraclitean notion of flux, drove him to a notion of continual betterment, a palingenesis ending in perfection. Because of the element of revelation he cannot allow so much genius to the race as does Herder. But Cf. 76 n.

94.

Not, indeed, that! But why could not each individual man have been existent on this earth more than once?

95.

Is this hypothesis therefore so absurd because it is the oldest, because the human understanding, ere enfeebled and scattered by sophistry, immediately hit upon it?

96.

Why may not even *I* have already taken here all the steps toward my perfection which mere temporal punishments and rewards can make for men, and (97) why not, at another time, take all those which the prospects of everlasting rewards help us so powerfully to make?

98.

Why may I not return as often as I am fit to acquire new knowledge, new skill? Do I bring away so much *at once* that there is not wherewith to recompense the burden of return?

99.

Is the reason that, or is it because I forget that I have already been here? (Well for me I do forget that! The memory of my earlier condition would permit me to make but a pernicious use of the present one. But what I *must* forget now, have I forgotten forever?)

100.

Or is it because too much time would thus for me be lost? Lost? And what have I to lose? Is not mine a whole eternity?⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Cf. "In education lies the great secret of the perfecting of human nature * * *. It is delightful to reflect that human nature will always be growing better through education and that this can be reduced to a form that is adapted to mankind. This opens up to us the prospect of the future happiness of the human race." Kant. *Über Pädagogik, Sämmtliche Werke*, T. 9 S. 373. Quoted by Lester F. Ward in *Applied Sociology Ch. X. Education as Opportunity*.

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